Equity Concerns During REDD+ Planning and Early Implementation: A Case from Malawi

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As REDD+ and "REDD-ready" voluntary carbon offset projects are implemented in Malawi, they encounter cultural and geographic particularities which create new equity concerns and exacerbate existing tensions surrounding forest access and land use in and around the project area. These concerns span the entire process of carbon offset production, including the social components of REDD+ projects and the technical activities necessary for project validation. The case studies that follow demonstrate the importance of considering the impacts of the social programs planned as part of a project as well as the technical activities that precede carbon sales.

This chapter presents two specific examples of social justice and equity issues arising from voluntary carbon offset projects in protected areas in the Northern Region of Malawi. First, the implementation of REDD+ will mean changes in land use and access to resources not only on forest land within the project boundaries, but also on community land outside of the project zone where tree-planting and other livelihood projects are planned. Communities and state agencies have different interpretations of how these tree-planting activities will impact land use, crop production, and human-animal conflict. Second, technical processes such as biomass surveys and ongoing monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) activities may violate cultural norms or traditional belief systems when these activities occur in culturally important forest spaces—such as graveyards—or involve trees with spiritual and ritual significance. This case study examines

voluntary carbon projects that are in the planning and early implementation stages, in which planners have completed the initial carbon measurements and started to roll out the various livelihood projects planned as part of the overall carbon conservation strategy.

In general, REDD+ and other voluntary carbon projects can pose multiple social and environmental justice concerns for communities. The process of obtaining informed consent from target communities is subject to different power dynamics between actors, which can result in coercion of some people by project planners or community leaders (Milne and Adams 2012). In some cases, the consent process fails to involve members of the target communities in the project in any substantive way (McElwee 2012; McElwee *this volume*). Even after the initial consent process concludes, people may not fully understand the full range of costs and benefits of carbon projects (Chernela 2014; Yocum 2013). In some cases, violence has erupted between affected communities and those policing project areas (Checker 2009). Some communities have lost access to forest resources that store carbon, while others have been forcibly removed from within project areas in order to maximize carbon sequestration potential (Beymer-Farris and Bassett 2012).

The latest guidelines for REDD+ and some voluntary standards have begun to address more comprehensive concerns regarding consent, benefits distribution, resource access, and respect for cultural values (Laughlin et al. 2013; Peskett and Todd 2012; REDD+ Social and Environmental Standards Initiative 2012). Voluntary projects, however, including for-profit, private sector projects, in countries that do not have or are still developing national REDD+ strategies and guidelines—like those discussed in this chapter—are required to meet the specifications of their chosen validator, which may or may not be as stringent as REDD+ guidelines. These guidelines are presented as best practices and recommendations which provide

the flexibility needed to adapt consent procedures for individual project and in-country scenarios (UN-REDD Programme 2010; Laughlin et al. 2013). Thus, there is a significant amount of interpretation and adaptation on the part of carbon developers, project planners, and community representatives as they attempt to introduce the project to target communities and obtain their consent for the project.

In addition to these concerns, the social and ecological context poses additional problems for achieving project outcomes while equitably distributing benefits and risks associated with carbon projects. The standardization of consent and technical measurement procedures can interact in unexpected ways during the early phases of project implementation (Milne 2012), reinforcing the importance of attending to the specific historical, social, and ecological context for each project area. In Malawi, members of target communities are concerned about receiving compensation for carbon storage services and maintaining their access to forest resources; however, they are also concerned about how the project will impact their ability to manage forest spaces outside of the reserve, as well as to observe traditional belief practices involving spaces or objects that might be targeted for project activities.

These observations are based on twelve months of ethnographic research in forest and game reserves in the Northern Region of Malawi between 2009 and 2012, including in-depth interviews and participant observation with stakeholders from target communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the Department of National Parks and Wildlife (DNPW), the Forestry Department, donor agencies, and a for-profit carbon development company.

[H1] Background and Research Sites

This case study considers voluntary carbon projects in two protected areas in Malawi's Northern Region—Vwaza Marsh Wildlife Reserve and Mkuwazi Forest Reserve. Vwaza Marsh

Wildlife Reserve protects a perennial wetland, a lake, and the surrounding forested hills. This area is an important breeding area for migratory birds and water fowl and is also home to elephant, buffalo, hippopotamus, crocodile, and numerous species of antelope (Department of National Parks and Wildlife 2004). The Mkuwazi Forest Reserve is located near the shores of Lake Malawi and protects a hill and the low-lying forests that surround it. One of the last stands of broadleaf evergreen forest in the area, the seventeen square kilometer reserve provides an important habitat for several species of culturally important trees as well as rare primates, several species of birds found nowhere else in Malawi, and at least one endemic species of butterfly (Department of Forestry 2009).

The Vwaza and Mkuwazi protected areas are also important resources for the approximately 125,000 people who live within five kilometers of the boundaries of these areas. People living near these areas rely primarily on firewood or charcoal to meet their energy needs, and are dependent on rain-fed agriculture to grow maize, legumes, pumpkins, fruits, and vegetables as well as cash crops of tobacco, ground nuts, soy, or cotton. The protected areas are important resources for firewood, building materials, and wild foodstuffs such as meat, eggs, fruits, vegetables, and mushrooms. Many people living near protected areas also sell products from the forest, including charcoal, timber, fiber, mushrooms, meat, and cultivated honey. Some of these activities, such as the collection of non-timber forest products, are permitted under a comanagement agreement between the communities and the state authorities that manage the protected areas, while others, such as hunting and logging, are unlawful.

Protected areas in Malawi have a complex historical and social context, which has ramifications for the carbon projects being planned there. Land in Malawi falls into three categories: government land, which includes all designated protected areas; customary land,

which is under the purview of traditional authorities and where villages and agricultural fields are located; and private land. The protected areas were carved out of customary land, and their expansion has been at the expense of local people, who were forced to abandon their homes and fields. In the early 1900s, the colonial administration began to establish game and forest reserves to protect valuable game animals and commercial timber species (Morris 2001; Zulu 2008; Zulu 2012). In the 1920s, villages were relocated from inside the newly-established Mkuwazi Forest Reserve to adjacent areas (Interview, May 2012), and restrictions were put in place in Vwaza and Mkuwazi, and other protected areas to control hunting and cutting timber by non-white persons (Adams and McShane 1992; McCracken 2006; Young 1953). After gaining independence in 1964, the Malawian government expanded existing forest and game reserves and established several national parks (Zulu 2009). In the 1970s, Vwaza Marsh was declared a Game Reserve and 2000 people were forcibly removed from within the new reserve boundaries, their homes dismantled to discourage them from returning (Department of National Parks and Wildlife 2004). Many residents living near Vwaza and Mkuwazi feel that the resources in the protected areas are rightfully theirs, and as such regularly enter the reserves—with or without permission from the authorities—to hunt, cut timber, or gather other resources. These coercive removals and ongoing disputes over access to resources are continued sources of tension between local residents and the state agencies that manage these areas.

In the 1990s, global recognition of the failure of this "fortress conservation" model (Brockington 2002) prompted a shift towards community-based natural resource management (CBNRM), which attempted to engage the community in the conservation of protected areas in exchange for financial or other in-kind benefits.[ii] In Malawi, comanagement agreements between the communities and the managing state agencies make provisions for community groups to

collect non-timber forest products such as thatching grass, mushrooms, wild fruits and vegetables, and firewood, as well as limited amounts of timber for construction (Department of National Parks and Wildlife 2004). The agreements also allow for the communities to receive a portion of the revenue generated through tourism in these areas. These revenues have been used to finance small development projects, such as putting metal roofs on schools and purchasing concrete for the construction of new teachers' houses (Interview, February 2012). Although unauthorized entry into the protected areas is illegal, enforcement is difficult. The boundaries are porous, enforcement agencies are understaffed, and people living in adjacent villages routinely enter the protected areas outside of the rules dictated by the comanagement agreements.

Carbon project planners have drawn on these comanagement agreements when structuring benefits distribution plans for both the Vwaza and Mkuwazi areas. The carbon project in Vwaza was envisioned as part of a multi-million dollar, multi-year, biodiversity conservation and development project, funded by USAID and implemented by Total LandCare (TLC), a conservation and development NGO based in Malawi with strong ties to the US. As part of a strategy to create sustainable revenue streams for the communities living near the protected areas, TLC partnered with Terra Global Capital, a US-based, for-profit carbon development firm to create a voluntary carbon offset project. During my fieldwork in 2011, field teams were working to complete the initial biomass surveys, and a community organizer trained by Terra Global to conduct initial introductory meetings with the target communities. The project was validated in 2014 through the Verified Carbon Standard and the Climate, Community, and Biodiversity Alliance, with the goal of integrating this project into a national REDD+ framework in the future. Project planners hope that revenues from carbon sales could provide money to buy necessities, replacing a reliance on natural resources with a cash economy, thereby maximizing

conservation and development outcomes (Terra Global Capital, LLC 2013; Terra Global Capital 2013; Terra Global Capital, LLC and Total LandCare 2011).

The project in Mkuwazi was similarly conceived as a conservation and development project that would generate revenue for the seven communities living adjacent to the reserve in exchange for protecting the forest and reducing illegal logging. The project was originally funded in 2008 by USAID as part of their Community Partnerships for Sustainable Resource Management (COMPASS II) and implemented by the Malawian government, a consortium of Malawian NGOs, and Plan Vivo (Malawi Environment Endowment Trust 2009). Planners held community meetings to introduce the carbon project, measured carbon stocks, and trained community technicians to record tree growth to support future MRV requirements (Interview, April 2013). The Mkuwazi project stalled when the planners were unable to complete final certification to begin selling carbon.[iii] Pending successful implementation of the Kulera Project, Terra Global Capital plans to expand its activities to Mkuwazi and other protected areas across Malawi.

[H2] Tree-planting and Land Use

Part of the "+" in REDD+ means that additional social and ecological benefits are planned as part of the carbon project. This means that not all project activities necessarily take place within the defined project area monitored for carbon sequestration. In Vwaza, additional livelihood and conservation activities will take place outside of the protected areas on community-owned land within five kilometers of the protected area border. One such livelihood activity includes expanding woodlots[iv] and sponsoring reforestation efforts in village forest areas to meet subsistence needs for firewood and building materials, thereby reducing pressure on the

timber resources inside of the project zone and increasing the carbon stores—and earning potential—of the project.

Unlike neighboring countries, Malawi does not have wildlife management areas to serve as a buffer between the protected area and adjacent villages. In those countries, comanagement arrangements near protected areas with buffer zones usually allow for limited use of resources from within this buffer area; likewise, some carbon projects site tree planting initiatives in these zones. In Malawi, however, there are no buffer zones between the protected areas and the fields and villages of the communities living nearby. In some areas, crops are cultivated to within feet of the wire fence that defines the protected area, and some villages are located just across the dirt access road, less than thirty feet from the boundary. If the project planners intend to plant trees in order to reduce the dependence on resources within the protected areas—and therefore within the carbon project zone—it is necessary to plant trees on customary land administered by traditional authorities.

Although tree planting projects have been taking place in these areas for a number of years, the carbon project would increase the scale and scope of tree planting. The project planners propose to plant or regenerate 5,600 ha of woodlots near Vwaza in the first three years (Terra Global Capital, LLC 2013). The tree planting project will target community land that is not currently cultivated, aiming to regenerate forest areas controlled by village leaders and to establish or reforest woodlots within the village.

Villagers and state officials have different interpretations of the possible impacts of these tree planting activities. Project planners and state officials believe that increased tree cover outside of the protected area will not only provide more accessible fuel wood and building materials for local residents, but also serve as a *de facto* buffer zone to decrease unauthorized

entrance into the protected area and reduce human-animal conflict. Villagers, on the other hand, worry that increased tree cover near their villages will entice more animals to leave the protected area and escalate incidences of crop predation by wildlife.

The issue of human-animal conflict was a common concern for both officials and villagers, and was a constant source of tension between managers and the communities. Near Vwaza, most incidences involved illegal hunting inside of the reserve or animals eating crops and destroying agricultural fields in surrounding village areas. Many villagers considered hunting as a way to add meat to a protein-poor diet, as well as a method to control animal populations (Yocum 2013). Hunting inside of any protected area is illegal, and the DNPW is involved in educational outreach to deter hunting, while game scouts and forest guards routinely remove wire snares, confiscate home-made firearms, and arrest those caught hunting or possessing bush meat. On the other hand, the destruction of crops by animals that leave the reserve is a constant concern for people living near the wildlife reserve. For example, during one week, elephants destroyed crops on four separate nights in a single village. In addition to eating food crops, large animals such as elephants and hippos can be particularly destructive when moving through fields since they can trample storage sheds and other infrastructure. These large animals are also dangerous when confronted, particularly at night.

Villagers expressed concern that trees and vegetation outside of the reserve would provide additional food and cover which would entice animals to leave the reserve more frequently or in larger numbers. One woman directly associated increased tree cover with increased crop predation, stating that "when we take care of those trees outside of the reserve, elephants come to eat those trees. As elephants eat those trees, they also eat maize" (interview, May 2012). Another woman reiterated this sentiment, adding that "[project planners] tell us that

we should plant trees. But elephants come and eat those branches of trees. So then how will we be helped?" (Interview, May 2012). A third woman worried that project planners had not anticipated how the destruction of trees by elephants would impact the total amount of carbon that would be sequestered and so people would receive lower payments overall. These statements express concern not only for potential increases in crop predation, but also fears that the destructive power of elephants could deprive people of anticipated revenues from carbon sales as well as the fuel wood and building timbers that the tree planting project was meant to address in the first place.

There was also fear that dangerous animals, particularly buffalo and poisonous snakes, would be attracted to village woodlots and forest areas if grasses and other vegetation were allowed to proliferate in these areas. One man worried that planting additional trees would pose risks not only to their crops but also to the safety of his family:

> [ext] "[Planting trees] may invite some wild animals which will come and eat [the trees]. For our safety, we have to clear around our surroundings so that snakes should be scared away. So how can we be helped so that snakes and wild animals should not be coming closer to our homes?" (Interview, May 2012). [end ext]

When animals leave the protected areas, the need to protect crops as well as the opportunity to eat meat often prompts villagers to kill the animals. Residents reported that since most people cannot afford to eat meat regularly, they are tempted to kill animals that enter their fields. However, killing animals that leave the protected areas is also illegal.

Many residents felt they bore the burden in either situation: if they were caught killing animals either inside or outside of the reserve, they could be fined or jailed; however, when animals left the reserve and destroyed crops, the farmers rarely, if ever, received compensation from the DNPW or the Malawian government. Furthermore, community members were legally unable to do anything other than try to frighten the animals away or contact DNPW staff to come

and deal with them. Particularly with larger animals such as elephants, hippos, and antelope—many of which are endangered and all of which are protected whether they are inside or outside the boundaries of the protected areas—people could face heavy fines or jail time for harming the animals in any way.

While many of the DNPW personnel are not unsympathetic to the hardships caused by crop predation, their priority is the conservation of the animals and habitat within the protected areas. Many of them expressed a deep concern for protecting these areas, both to conserve the animals and plants, but also to ensure that people living near the reserves could continue to draw on those resources in future generations. They see woodlots and tree planning as key steps in the conservation and development effort. The DNPW employees' livelihoods depend on the continued state management of these areas, so they have jobs and careers which are contingent upon continued efforts to conserve these areas, efforts which are increasingly tied to the carbon project.

In Vwaza, the multiple potential futures of the tree planting activities and what they mean for different actors may become a key source of conflict as the project progresses. In this case, concerns over the distribution of and access to resources may take unexpected forms. During the early stages of the carbon project, residents near Vwaza voiced their concern that the carbon project would impact their access to resources within the reserve; however, many residents were equally as concerned that the livelihood projects planned as part of the carbon project would further inhibit their ability to control wildlife that leave the reserve and damage crops and village infrastructure. The issue of animal predation of food crops was as important to residents as maintaining access to the resources within the reserve and ensuring that they were included in the benefits distribution plans for the project. Therefore, as REDD+ activities extend beyond the

project area and increasingly include livelihood projects that may impact resources both within and outside of the project area, critical analysis must also extend beyond the immediate project area to include the full range of project impacts and the spaces in which they are experienced.

[H3] Cultural Norms and Sacred Spaces

Before any of the social projects related to the carbon project can take place, the project must be certified to sell carbon, requiring a full assessment of how much carbon the forests can sequester over the project period. The technical processes used to measure the carbon stocks for the project can exacerbate existing tensions regarding access to and use of resources. It can be difficult to balance the need to meet the technical standards for measuring carbon stocks mandated by international or company policy, donor expectations, and third party verifiers with the need to respect cultural and local norms that dictate appropriate behavior within the project areas. This becomes more complicated given the time constraints and limitations posed by the validation and verification processes necessary to produce marketable carbon credits.

The technical activities used to create the initial baseline studies and to perform the ongoing monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) activities require routine field surveys throughout the life of the carbon project. The initial biomass plot survey activities include measuring the size of the trees within the plot, taking photos and GPS coordinates, and collecting samples of soil and non-tree vegetation to be analyzed for carbon content in the lab. Field teams also bury a piece of metal rebar in the soil, remove a portion of the bark of a large indicator tree, and paint other trees to create markers for each permanent sampling plot to facilitate future field surveys. These required technical procedures are considered innocuous by project planners; however, these activities have very different meanings for communities who are often unaware of when the procedures are to take place or what they entail.

Sample biomass plots might be located in or adjacent to graveyards, important cultural sites, or individual trees which are important in traditional belief systems. In Malawi, the spirits of the deceased (*mizimu*) are associated with woodlands, graveyards, and wild animals, while living people are associated with villages, agricultural fields, and domesticated animals (Morris 2000a; Schoffeleers 1997). Mizimu are not considered to be devoid of life, but represent another phase of being that continues to be important to surviving relatives and community members. Graveyards are an important site in the transformation of deceased persons into ancestral spirits; likewise, particular trees are an integral part in practices that connect the living and spiritual communities. Ancestral spirits play an important role in the lives and welfare of the living through their association with rain and fertility, and are therefore accorded a great deal of respect. Certain tree species, such as *msolo* (*Pseudolachnostylis maprouneifolia*) and *mpoza* (*Annona senegalensis*) are particularly associated with the spirits of ancestors and so are accorded a degree of respect (Morris 2000b). In some areas, offerings of flour are left at the foot of these trees to promote successful hunting, and these trees are prized for their fruit and medicinal qualities (Morris 2000b).

Across the African continent, graveyards are located in wooded areas and are protected through cultural practices, making graveyards particularly attractive sites for biodiversity conservation efforts (Sheridan and Nyamweru 2008). In Malawi, people do not hunt, gather firewood or thatch, collect medicine, or cut down trees in these areas. Other than during funerals and certain initiation rites, access to graveyards is restricted and avoided. Anyone entering a graveyard is met with mistrust and suspicion, and potentially viewed as a witch or sorcerer seeking body parts of the deceased as activating substances for harmful medicines (Colson and Gluckman 1959; Morris 2000a; van Breugel 2001). Even in areas which have been heavily

deforested or degraded, stands of trees surrounding the graveyards remain intact. Since these areas are already being conserved by the community, these micro-biodiversity hotspots are often targets for conservation and carbon investment.

Biomass surveys and MRV activities, when conducted in graveyards or involving particular tree species with high cultural value, may violate culturally appropriate modes of behavior and resource use in these areas. For example, cutting and removing vegetation from graveyards during the biomass surveys violates cultural traditions which mandate that all vegetation remain inside of these spaces in order to show proper respect for the ancestral spirits and maintain the appropriate balance between the worlds of the spirits and the living. Likewise, digging in graveyards for any reason other than to prepare a grave is considered suspicious and alarming behavior.

Furthermore, debarking and marking trees is associated with traditional divination rituals that are used to identify sorcerers. The Mkuwazi Forest Reserve derives its name from particular trees used in divination rituals. Mkuwazi is a cognate of the word *mvwabvi* or *uhavi* which refers to the poison ordeal, a ritual in which accused sorcerers are given a poisonous drink prepared from the bark and roots of the tree and other medicinal substances (Interview, May 2012). If the accused person vomits, then it is taken as proof of their innocence; death is proof of their guilt. Mkuwazi Forest Reserve is one of the last places that the *mkuwazi* or *mwabvi* tree still grows. People sometimes travel hundreds of kilometers to collect the bark from this tree for use in these divining rituals. The exact location of these trees within the reserve is a carefully guarded secret known only to those who are specially trained to administer the ritual, and only these individuals are allowed to remove bark or roots from these trees. Traditional leaders living near Mkuwazi

expressed concern that marking or debarking these trees during routine project survey activities could compromise the efficacy of these rituals (Interview, May 2012).

Additionally, MRV activities can contradict the rules set forth in the comanagement agreements in both the Mkuwazi and Vwaza areas and can reignite villagers' fears that the carbon project would lead to further loss of access to forest resources. Tree bark and roots are used for fiber or medicine, but forest and wildlife managers discourage people from removing bark and roots because excessive harvest can damage trees. As such, this activity is limited or disallowed in the comanagement agreements. People living near the protected areas found it difficult to understand why field teams conducting biomass surveys were allowed to enter the protected areas and remove tree bark, roots, and surrounding vegetation, often with the help of the same forest guards and game scouts who enforced the comanagement agreement and punished locals for doing the same. Furthermore, misunderstandings about these biomass surveys played into community fears that the carbon project would further restrict their access to forest resources and project benefits. In Vwaza, the pieces of metal rebar buried in the ground were mistaken by residents for machines that will strip the area of carbon resources to avoid compensating locals; they were also mistaken for landmines meant to harm villagers who illegally enter the protected areas.

Project timelines can increase the potential for such misunderstandings. While some validation standards, such as the Gold Standard of the Climate, Community, and Biodiversity Alliance used in Vwaza (2013), specifically require the documentation of areas of high cultural value during project design and initial phases of project implementation, members of target communities might not be immediately forthcoming about the locations of these places. The location of *mwabvi* trees is not common knowledge because of the powerful substances that can

be derived from them. Due to this secrecy, and the pejorative way that traditional beliefs about sorcery are often viewed by outsiders, communities are unlikely to disclose the precise location of these trees, and so their location is unlikely to appear on lists or maps of culturally important areas made during initial visits by project planners, even if that information is explicitly solicited. Other important areas, such as graveyards, might be easily identifiable by biomass survey teams, but observing cultural expectations for proper conduct in those areas requires consultation with the affected communities. In order to reduce misunderstanding and potential future conflicts, field teams need to communicate the procedures involved in marking and measuring the permanent biomass plots to the community and establish procedures that allow for ongoing engagement with community members. In addition, provisions could be made to solicit community feedback on the procedures and the locations involved in MRV activities prior to implementation and periodically revisited, and if necessary, amended, throughout the life of the project. Doing so would help to alleviate Mkuwazi residents' worries about what the carbon project will mean for them and their ability to maintain proper relationships between the living community and the wider community of ancestral spirits.

[H4] Conclusion

These case studies illustrate the need for project planners, researchers, and affected communities to consider the full range of activities necessary to produce REDD+ projects and carbon offsets in order to identify and evaluate the potential areas of conflict or violations of social and environmental justice. The ability of target communities to attenuate exposure to various risks is impacted by all aspects of the carbon project, including the additional livelihood projects associated with REDD+ and the technical procedures that take place prior to project validation. Resource access is one aspect of these concerns, but people living in target

communities in Northern Malawi were also concerned about their ability to deal with wildlife, manage relationships with ancestral spirits, and mitigate risks from sorcery. Not all resource concerns will be confined to designated project areas or be voiced as access to forest resources; instead these concerns may center on resources found outside of the forest area, or on the cultural importance of the resources in question. Additionally, the particularities of the local context reorder where and when equity concerns arise and the forms they take. Project planners and researchers should scrutinize the earliest phases of the project—long before any benefits are distributed to communities—to identify new forms of resource distribution or decision-making that could jeopardize attempts to incorporate social benefits into these programs, or that arise from efforts to include social benefits in carbon projects in the first place.

These case studies provide two important lessons for project planners and for those engaging in critical research about the impacts of REDD+ and other voluntary carbon projects. First, the social benefits in REDD+ projects do not necessarily alleviate the social and environmental justice issues related to carbon offset projects; rather, the livelihood programs associated with REDD+ projects can themselves introduce additional equity concerns. With the coming of REDD+ and an increased focus on expanding and enhancing the social benefits portfolio of climate change mitigation ventures, increasing numbers of additional livelihood projects will include components or activities that take place outside of the official carbon project area. As such, both the carbon sequestration component and the social component of the project—whether within the designated project area or outside of it—need to be considered as potential sites for violations of social justice and equity. These social projects require the same attention and critical engagement as the carbon offsetting process.

Second, engagement with target communities must begin early, during the planning and early implementation phases of the project, including initial technical activities. Although engagement with target communities at this early stage may seem unnecessary or superfluous, the potential for negative social impacts on communities already exists at the earliest stages of the project. Before social or ecological benefits accrue, the very act of measuring and monitoring carbon stocks can infringe on cultural belief systems. These activities may reignite tensions over the control and access to land and forests in question, particularly if communities associate these actions with past efforts to control resources. Project planners should communicate all aspects of the project—including details about the initial biomass surveys and related technical activities—to residents of target communities.

The issues discussed in this case study are problems that come from the confluence of REDD+ activities and the existing social, historical context of land appropriation, use, and asymmetrical power relationships between rural Malawians and their government, foreign NGOs, and business enterprises involved in the carbon project. Under the second version of the CCBA under which the Kulera project was validated, there are no explicit guidelines concerning the technical measurement processes or potential impacts of project activities that take place outside of the project area. While the latest version of the CCBA guidelines have made great strides towards addressing this, any project that is already in the validation pipeline is grandfathered in to the standards in place when they began the process. In spite of these shortcomings, the Kulera Project was only the third one worldwide to achieve the triple Gold Standard from the CCBA meaning that the project provides exceptional benefits for the community, biodiversity, and for carbon capture. This demonstrates the very real gaps between

what is considered adequate participation and social safeguard considerations in the certification and verification world and what might be necessary on the ground.

Ethnographic examples and in-depth case studies demonstrate how risks and benefits can be distributed temporally, geo-spatially, and socio-culturally across the particular social and environmental context in which these projects are implemented. Both the carbon project and associated social projects will encounter the specific histories of land use and natural resource management in those areas. Depending on the extent to which project activities exacerbate or mitigate existing inequalities between community members or between target communities and land managers, REDD+ projects may bring up a host of concerns, some of which will not be directly related to carbon sequestration or benefits distribution, areas where REDD+ project planners, advocates, and critics are more conditioned to focus.

It is important to attend to the way that equity concerns are voiced by target communities and project planners, as well as the underlying issues informing these concerns. Waiting to examine impacts after the project is well underway may miss important opportunities to create REDD projects that enhance social well-being instead of merely doing no harm or worsening living conditions for target communities. Examining the implementation of specific REDD-ready projects illustrates the importance of local context to the potential successes or failures of REDD+. Anthropology is uniquely positioned to generate such case studies through long-term, qualitative research with various stakeholders in order to demonstrate the ways in which carbon offsets can create new challenges for meeting conservation, poverty alleviation, and climate mitigation targets.

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[ii] The reasons behind this shift and the success of CBNRM are questionable. A further discussion lies outside of the scope of this chapter, but for more information, see (Berkes 2004; Berkes 2007; Blaikie 2006; Brockington 2002; Brockington 2004; Ribot, Agrawal, and Larson 2006; Schafer and Bell 2002).

[iii] The Plan Viov project in Mkuwazi stalled due to several factors, including the inability to locate an initial buyer for the carbon credits (Interview November 2011; personal communication from Plan Vivo). The Government of Scotland was the original buyer, but withdrew financial support in 2010-2012, when many bi-lateral donors withheld non-essential aid to protest the late President Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika's increasing suppression of civil and political rights as well as his government's refusal to follow the International Monetary Fund's recommendation to devalue the Malawian currency by over 50% and allow it to float on foreign currency markets. Donor relations were briefly normalized after his death in April 2012. The global economic recession and falling price of carbon credits also contributed to the difficulties in locating another buyer.

[iv] Woodlots are areas where trees are planted and cultivated to meet needs for timber and firewood. They are usually located on land in or near the village, or on people's personal land holdings. Village forest areas are forested areas with natural vegetation located on customary land. They are usually located outside of the village and are under the authority of traditional authorities.